

4 June 1978

For More C.I.A. Books

media
6 file
'books'

By A.J. Langguth

LOS ANGELES—So far, we have had three defectors from the Central Intelligence Agency, and by my calculations we need 300 more. To root out the undergrowth in our democracy will require that at least that many former C.I.A. officers come forward to write about their secret activities since 1947.

While some, like Philip Agee, may describe their trail of lies and corruption in more than one country, the average memoirs, like the books by Frank Snapp or John Stockwell, will probably inform us about C.I.A. actions in a single country. So to do the job properly we must have 300 men and women — one who served in each of 100 countries during the 1950's, the 1960's and the 1970's. They should be encouraged to take the risk, gather up their notes and break their vows of silence. And, if necessary, to proceed with appropriate caution until their books are in the stores. When Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks were more forthright, the C.I.A. took their book to court, and the result was those blank spaces on many pages of "The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence."

We can't accept those gaps any longer. Much of the impact of Mr. Agee's "Inside the Company: CIA Diary" derives from its sheer numbing length: all those Latin-American politicians and policemen and journalists suborned, all that hectic underhanded activity to maintain the status quo.

Journalists alone, even a Seymour M. Hersh or a Jack Anderson, cannot

expose enough of what we need to know. Nor can scholars, Congressional committees or the C.I.A.'s political victims.

People in each of those categories were helpful when I was piecing together the United States role in overthrowing Brazil's democracy in 1964 and our complicity in the subsequent torture that has stained Latin-American history through the last decade. But each group also has its severe limitations.

• *The scholars.* Academicians have been slow to believe that their Government would lie to them. Several books from university presses have described in detail the fall of Brazil's President, João Goulart, who was deposed in the same way that Salvador Allende Gossens of Chile was brought down nine years later. But except for Dr. Jan Black's recent account, "United States Penetration in Brazil," the professors have often accepted uncritically the denials of United States involvement from Washington and from our Embassy in Rio de Janeiro.

• *The victims.* In prison, they are usually inaccessible. On their release, many are understandably reluctant to risk a return to the torture chambers. In Montevideo, some brave men and women did agree to speak with me. But even in their own homes, they spoke in guarded whispers — this in Uruguay, a model of democracy only a dozen years ago. When, exiled outside their own countries, they can be induced to speak, they have much to tell

us. It was a Brazilian student, banished to Paris, who told me that the head of one of the cruelest prisons in Rio de Janeiro and a man directly involved with the torture there had afterward been appointed director of the new National Police Academy in Brasilia, a training school supported by our Government.

Such exiles, however, are scattered in Algeria, Stockholm, Geneva, Paris. Amnesty International regularly compiles their stories in horrifying pamphlets, but that admirable organization cannot serve as a true investigative agency.

• *The United States Congress.* Even for such well-intentioned men as Senators James Abourezk and Frank Church, armed with subpoena powers and conducting their hearings under oath, the men of the C.I.A. and their cohorts have proved too slippery. Either they behave like Richard Helms, the former Director of Central Intelligence, or they become tantalizingly elusive, wanting to look ingenious even at the cost of seeming incompetent.

• *Reporters.* Those few United States correspondents based in Latin America are usually responsible for covering an entire continent, on which Brazil alone is larger than the United States mainland. When they are deliberately misled, they don't always have the time or the resources to expose a lie or evasion.

An example: The director of the entire United States program for training foreign policemen — a retired C.I.A. officer — assured me that he had assigned Dan Mitrione, who was later shot to death by Tupamaro guerrillas, to Uruguay because in 1969 it was "one of the nicest, most peaceful places" on earth. Eighteen months after that interview, under the Freedom of Information Act I obtained copies of the internal police reports sent back to Washington during that period and read by this man. I found them filled with alarms about the rampaging Tupamaros. Clearly, for a United States police adviser, Uruguay was to be no vacation resort. But, it had taken repeated written requests and telephone calls over a year and a half, well past the deadline for the average journalist, to get those formerly confidential documents.

Perhaps some day the civilian protagonists will tell us the truth about Brazil and Chile and all the rest. But I suspect it's more likely that their books will prove worthy shelfmates for Mr. Nixon's "R.N." That leaves only C.I.A. officers with hands they want to get clean. Two years ago, I asked Philip Agee whether some C.I.A. agent from Brazil wasn't at work on a confession that would simplify my research. "I don't know," Mr. Agee said. "And you understand that even if I knew, I couldn't tell you."

Quite right. But I watch the bookstores.

A.J. Langguth is author of "Hidden Terrors," about the Central Intelligence Agency and Latin America.